

A TEACHER'S GUIDE for **THE GEEKS SHALL INHERIT THE EARTH**

Spoilers included. Please read the book before the guide to avoid the plot twist spoiler!

INTRODUCTION

The Geeks Shall Inherit the Earth is a rich book that takes a real and extended look at six students and one teacher who are placed at or beyond the social fringe by clique formation and the treatment that often results. Alexandra Robbins spent years in schools, listening to students, and Geeks lets us share the experience. As such, the book provides many and varied opportunities for important pedagogical application. There are a number of ways to approach the book, and many ways to teach from it. While reading the book in its entirety is important for you to get a sense of what's possible, there are many smaller, more localized teaching options. What follows are suggestions for both the macro and micro types of exercise and instruction.

Depending on the grade level you're teaching, you may wish to assign the entire book to your students. There are several advantages in doing so. First, the stories of the seven individuals are woven together throughout in a way that creates a varied series of compelling narrative arcs. This creates narrative tension that, not unlike that of fiction, builds as the book progresses. Second, each successive chapter—a new stage of student experience—creates built-in moments for your students to pause, discuss, and write. Third, the seven subjects are all quite different. This gives your students a range of "characters" to identify with or become interested in, and it naturally creates a compare/contrast dynamic. Fourth, the sub-sections throughout the book are at their strongest and clearest in the context of the stories being told at that point in the book.

This book is organized in a way that is also conducive to isolated discussion topics and academic exercises. The narrative arc of each student is broken into smaller sections and organized by chapter. Any of these sections alone could give rise to valuable and compelling questions or writing assignments for a class. Amid the narratives, however, are also sub-sections that consider the great number of issues that arise from the students' experience, including identifying student clique labels, group behavior dynamics, courage and conformity, the positive and negative effects of popularity, and many more. A lesson plan with teaching options for each of these sections is included in this guide.

A NOTE ON RESPECT

Because the presence and effects of cliques are powerful and ubiquitous, it is strongly suggested that the issue of respect be addressed before many of these study options. Perhaps you've already established this in your classes. But if not, we believe it is important to discuss the subject of personal respect before many of the following activities are presented or engaged in.

A PREPARATORY STUDENT SURVEY

This initial gathering of information from your students can be anonymous or not. Either way, it will serve as helpful material for many exercises and activities in the classroom. You, as the teacher, are also encouraged to take the survey, as *Geeks* includes the experience of a marginalized teacher. This could help establish interest and trust in your students when they see that you are compelled to explore and understand something so central to their experience.

Part I: School as Social Space

A. Do you feel that your school is conformist? If so, how?

B. Do you feel any pressure to be, act, look, or fit in a certain way at school? If so, please explain what that's like.

C. Have you had any experiences of being excluded socially? If not, do you know people who have? Please explain those times.

Part II: Student Clique Labels

Though it is not essential, you may find it helpful to have your students read pages 37–42, “Emos, Indies, Scenes, and Bros: Today’s Student Labels” as an excerpt before they answer the questions.

A. What are the labels of all of the groups you can think of at your school (such as nerds, goths, emos, jocks, etc.)?

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| 1. | 6. | 11. |
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| 3. | 8. | 13. |
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| 5. | 10. | 15. |

B. What label or labels do you identify yourself with? Briefly describe the characteristics of each.

C. What labels do you think others define you with? What is it about you specifically that you believe makes them identify you with this label?

D. How do you feel about being labeled that way?

E. What has been difficult, if anything, about falling into that category?

Part III: Student Clique Behavior

A. How do people at your school treat students who are a little different from others (people who don't conform to the in-crowd "norm")? If you have had or know of any specific experiences with this, please explain them.

B. Have you ever been picked on, teased, or made fun of at school or by people from school? What was that like?

C. Have you ever received special treatment because you belonged to a certain social group at school? If so, explain. What was that like?

D. How does Facebook affect cliques and labels? Does it make it easier to cross clique boundaries or is it just another way to exclude people?

CLASS EXERCISE: Create a Student Clique Label Glossary

Compile the label names from your student surveys and prepare a list for class. Separate your students into small groups of three or four, ideally with a number of differently labeled students in each group (though use your judgment here to avoid grouping those who wouldn't transcend their labels to work well with each other). Allow each group to choose one label from the list. Repeat this until all labels are chosen.

Have each group define each of their labels as specifically as possible. This can be done in class, or as a take-home project. Then collect and compile all of the definitions into a glossary.

Discussion Option: Distribute the glossary to your students and either give them time to read through them or read through them as a class. Encourage the students to discuss or critique the sufficiency of each definition.

LESSON PLAN ONE: CHAPTER ONE: MEET THE CAFETERIA FRINGE

Summary

After a brief introduction to the concept of Quirk Theory, this chapter introduces us to the six students—Blue (The Gamer), Whitney (The Popular Bitch), Noah (The Band Geek), Eli (The Nerd), Joy (The New Girl), and Danielle (The Loner)—and one teacher—Regan (The Weird Girl)—whose experiences make up the narrative substance of *Geeks*. These initial portraits, full of descriptive detail and personal thoughts and statements, distinguish them as interesting individuals who have for different reasons been labeled in ways that place them at the social fringe (except for Whitney, who is part of the in-crowd but troubled by it).

Goals & Objectives

1. To understand the basic concepts presented in *Geeks*: Cafeteria Fringe, Quirk Theory, etc.
2. To meet and distinguish the six students and one teacher who are the subject of *Geeks*.
3. To analyze and discuss real-world experiences at the social fringe.

Comprehension Questions

1. Who are the “cafeteria fringe” and why are they named after this location?
2. Briefly explain Quirk Theory.
3. What is the “I Hate Dominoes Club”?
4. Name and briefly describe each of the people profiled.

Writing Response/Discussion Questions

5. Think about how Danielle was treated. What do you think causes such cruelty in students?
6. In what ways, if any, do you feel pressured to succeed academically, socially, athletically, or otherwise?
7. Robbins argues that “the No Child Left Behind Law, a disproportionate emphasis on SATs, APs, and other standardized tests, and a suffocating homogenization of the U.S. education system have all

contributed to a rabidly conformist atmosphere that stifles unique people, ideas, and expression." (p. 6) Do you agree with this? Offer specific examples as explanation and evidence.

8. Is testing and performance evaluation always stifling? Can you make an argument for its importance?
9. Consider Paul Tillich's statement when addressing a graduating university class in 1957: "We hope for nonconformists among you, for your sake, for the sake of the nation, for the sake of humanity." Is nonconformity essential? Explain why or why not. Is there any danger in nonconformity?
10. Consider the profile of the seven individuals. Who seems most interesting to you? Explain.

Exercise

Choose one of the seven individuals profiled in *Geeks* to focus on. Keep a journal as you read, recording specific thoughts and questions about his or her experiences, thoughts, feelings, and actions. Once you've finished the last section about this person, you might want to consider the following questions:

1. Why did you choose to focus on this person? How would you describe him or her?
2. What's interesting or unique about this person?
3. What's admirable about him or her?
4. Are there things he or she could have done differently?
5. What would you say to him or her if you could?
6. What did you learn from this person's experience?

Present your answers as either a class presentation or an analytical essay.

LESSON PLAN TWO: POPULARITY

Part I: The Secret of Popularity (pp. 54–58)

Summary

This section discusses recent scientific findings to help define the concept of popularity more specifically and accurately. It suggests that central to being popular are visibility, being recognizable, prestige, and social power that can be used positively (supporting many friends) or negatively (manipulating others). A distinction between "perceived popular," based on reputation, and "sociometrically popular," which measures a person's desire to be with or like another, suggests that a

stark difference can exist between one's social status and social acceptance. In other words, "to be popular does not [necessarily] mean to be liked."

Goals & Objectives

1. To expand understanding and refine a definition of the concept of popularity.
2. To apply this more complex understanding to assess and analyze the student experience.

Preparation

1. (Optional) Before reading the section about "The Secret of Popularity," assign an in-class free write asking students to define popularity or to name the characteristics that determine it. Briefly discuss.
2. Have students read "The Secret of Popularity."

Comprehension Questions

1. Why is Whitney, a popular student, included in a book about outcasts?
2. What qualities do sociologists suggest help generate popularity?
3. How can social power be positive or negative?
4. What's the difference between "perceived popular" (mean popular) and "sociometrically popular" (nice popular)?

Writing Response/Discussion Questions

1. Review the rules created by some of the popular students. What are the benefits of these rules for those students? What are the negative effects of having such extensive social rules?
2. When are rules important or helpful? What's the difference between, say, the rules of a game like baseball, or the rules of an exam, and the rules of the popular group?
3. Even if not as extensive, do you have rules (expressed or simply understood) among your close friends? Within your family? In other spheres of your life? In what ways are these helpful or limiting or both?

Exercise

Form small groups of 4–5 students. Create a random list of rules (3–5 should be sufficient) regarding your appearance and behavior and follow them for one week. Avoid things harmful or illegal.

Benign, peculiar, and certainly healthy choices will work quite well to explore the experience. Keep a journal for each day of the week and consider the following:

- a. How did it feel to have this random bond with your group? Did these feelings change over the short time?
- b. Did you find yourself behaving differently toward the members of your group than you did before? Explain any specifics.
- c. How often did you refer to or talk about your rules?
- d. Did others outside your group ask about or comment on your appearance or behavior choices? Explain any significant interactions.
- e. Once the week was over, and you stopped following the rules, observe how your feelings about and interaction with your group was affected.

Part II: Is Popularity Worth It? (pp. 345–350)

Summary

This section returns to the subject of popularity to examine its requirements from Whitney's point of view as a popular student, but also to consider the potential disadvantages and costs of such status. It explores the behavior required to be successfully popular and offers various specific and extreme examples of the lengths to which students will go to achieve this. Also discussed are recent pharmacological findings that suggest that serotonin may be related to popularity, and thus a drug could be developed to help adjust a person's temperament. Potential negative effects of popularity are considered, including increased aggression over time, poorer academic performance, disruptive behavior, stress, and a loss of individuality. And Whitney suggests neutrality, not popularity, as a prescription for happiness.

Goals & Objectives

1. To examine the concepts of conformity and the sacrifice of individuality.
2. To develop a critique of popularity and the behaviors it requires.
3. To explore the question of whether popularity is worth the various potential negative effects.
4. To consider the concept of social neutrality.

Preparation

1. (Optional) Before reading the section “Is Popularity Worth It?” assign an in-class free write that considers what, if any, the negative effects of being popular are.
2. Read “Is Popularity Worth It?”

Comprehension Questions

1. What are the four behaviors Whitney states as necessary to gain and retain popularity?
2. What negative effects of popularity have psychologists measured?
3. What are several specific examples of the lengths students would go to for popularity?
4. What does Whitney conclude is the best approach to the social experience of high school?

Writing Response/Discussion Questions

1. Consider Whitney’s list of four behaviors required for popularity. Have you ever engaged in any of them for social reasons?
2. Focus on the concept of conformity. When is it necessary or even a good thing? What are its potential problems? When does it become dangerous?
3. If scientists developed a “popularity drug,” would you take it? Explain. Would this be different from the way many people use alcohol or other drugs?
4. What are your thoughts about Whitney’s eventual suggestion that social neutrality—being open to and friends with different types of people—is the best way to be happy? What would such interaction look like? Is it possible? Explain.

Exercise

Make a list of at least 20 ways (40 would be even better) in which you conform. This can include things as automatic or ingrained as wearing socks that match, eating with a fork, wearing certain clothes, or sitting in rows in the classroom. Also list more profound things like abiding by laws, going to church, or singing the national anthem before a baseball game.

Then, choose one of the actions on the list—something significant enough to be noticed by others, but still possible (of course avoiding the dangerous or illegal)—and change it for a day or even a week. Take notes on any interesting experience, but pay particular attention to how you felt throughout (rebellious? embarrassed? exhilarated?) and how others reacted (comments? questions?).

The results can be offered as a presentation to the class or as an analytical essay.

LESSON PLAN THREE: THE OUTCAST SUCCESS STORY (pp. 158–172)

Summary

This section demonstrates the concept of Quirk Theory. This is the idea that the same interests, skills, and characteristics that can make a student an outsider subject to derision and mistreatment during middle and high school years are valuable in life after school. Seven of the most valuable skills or qualities (creativity/originality, freethinking/vision, resilience, authenticity/self-awareness, integrity/candor, curiosity/passion, and courage) are defined and demonstrated in a variety of contexts, and all are shown to have existed all along in people who went on to be extremely successful.

Goals & Objectives

1. To define and articulate specific qualities and behaviors that lead to great success.
2. To better understand Quirk Theory by seeing the contrast between how certain abilities are devalued during school years and yet are important and even revered in the larger world.
3. To practice recognizing and demonstrating these skills and qualities.

Preparation

1. (Optional) Before reading “The Outcast Success Story,” assign a free write that asks the students to list as many of the qualities and characteristics they can think of that are necessary to become very successful after school.
2. Read “The Outcast Success Story.”

Comprehension Questions

1. What are the seven highly valued skills or characteristics discussed in this section?
2. Name a person or company used as an example of each.

Writing Response/Discussion Questions

1. Choose one of the seven qualities discussed and list as many people as you can who you believe have exhibited it. Be specific in your example of the situation and the action.
2. Why do you think these characteristics aren’t valued in the same way in school?
3. Can any of these qualities be taken too far, becoming problematic? For example, what’s the difference between freethinking and being spaced out? Can someone be too self-aware? Is candor ever rude? What’s the difference between passion and obsession?

Exercise

Part I: Identify

After becoming familiar with the seven skills or qualities discussed in this section, write the name of each at the top of separate pages of a notebook. Over the course of one week, in and out of school, keep track of any specific examples you witness or hear about that you believe demonstrate that quality. Describe the situation and action (or decision not to act) with specific detail, and what the result was.

After the week, generate a class discussion in which you describe the various specific examples you witnessed. This should help you become open to a variety of possibilities with each quality and prepare you for Part II.

Part II: Personify

Outcast Merit Badges

Follow up the experience of witnessing these qualities in action with the challenge of engaging in them. Over a week's time, make a gesture or act in a way that demonstrates each of the qualities. You may want to list them first and present them to your teacher for approval. Again, as you keep track, write specifically about the situation, the action, and the reaction or results of each attempt.

(For teachers)

You can take the recognition as far as you'd like. At the very least, keep a checklist for each student. These are potentially challenging risks for your students and they will appreciate being recognized and given credit for taking them. If you want to go the extra mile, and believe your students would appreciate it, make merit badges for each of the seven behaviors and award them to the students.

Reporting the findings would make an excellent class presentation or narrative analytical essay.

LESSON PLAN FOUR: IN THE SHADOW OF THE FREAK TREE (pp. 105–110)

Summary

In this section we meet an additional group of fringe students who are considered to be more extreme in their nonconformist behavior. They are known for playing games, acting out movie scenes, openly showing emotion, and talking freely about non-mainstream subjects. This quick look at them suggests that, far from weird, they are all “fantastic kids” simply perceived or labeled as weird because of oversimplified social judgments.

Goals & Objectives

1. To consider more extreme forms of nonconformist behavior.
2. To practice a more complete critical thinking about these students.
3. To explore how to interview someone with journalistic interest and objectivity.
4. To write about a person in a way that avoids oversimplification and instead creates a multidimensional portrait that broadens understanding.

Comprehension Questions

1. Describe the type of students who gather beneath the Freak Tree.
2. What does Amy value about her time with the group?
3. What is DRAT and how is it symbolic?
4. What does the author conclude about the kind of people these fringe students are?
5. Briefly describe Suzanne, Laney, Allie, and Flor.

Writing Response/Discussion Questions

1. The students who gather at the Freak Tree don't seem self-conscious or ashamed of their behavior or how harshly they are judged for it. Do you believe this is healthy or some form of denial?
2. What might it be about these students—as individuals or as a group—that keeps them from feeling oppressed by such social judgment?
3. Amy values the group in part because it allows her to “act like a kid for once.” What qualities or behaviors from childhood are valuable to maintain as we grow up? Offer specific examples of their value in an adult context.
4. What qualities from childhood might seem to be inappropriate in an adult?

Exercises

1. If you are considered a member of the “outsiders” group, write an essay that explores one of the following subjects:
 - a. Examine closely what is valuable to you about being in the group. How did you come to be involved with it? Have you always felt the same about being in the fringe group?
 - b. Introduce one or more members of the group to mainstream readers. What are his or her

specific characteristics, interests? What relevant biographical information might people not know? Exploring Robbins's claim, what do you find "fantastic" about this person?

2. Find someone who is a member of a group different from your own, and interview that person as a reporter might. Be sure to explain your project at the beginning and emphasize that you are trying to understand, not ridicule. You might want to make copies of this short section of the book for them to read ahead of time. Write a list of questions ahead of time. While this assignment can be carried out via email or IM, you will find it more productive and interesting (and challenging!) to actually talk with the students.

Once you have completed your interviews, choose what to do with the information:

- a. Write individual character sketches like Robbins does. Be specific and work to capture the unique, distinguishing qualities and characteristics of the individual.
 - b. Write an analytical essay that describes the individuals but also generates an argument based on what you learned from your interviews. Did you find something similar to Robbins? If not, what was different?
 - c. Present your findings verbally to the class. Offer interesting, unique details to make your audience feel as if they are meeting the individuals. Focus on the various things about the students that you did not know and that changed your perspective.
3. Assemble a small group (3–5) of student volunteers from the "outsiders" group as a discussion panel for your class. Students will talk about their interests, what is enjoyable about the group, how they developed it, and clear up common misconceptions.

The challenge here is to prevent the normal social judgments and criticisms from being voiced during the discussion. But the payoff could be to literally introduce these people to others in an important and direct way. There are several ways to control the conversation. You could just write the questions yourself. Or, if you want to involve the class, have them write questions down on cards ahead of time and choose from those. If you feel confident in the maturity of your classmates, you can open the panel up to direct questioning. But you and your teacher should make very clear ahead of time that disrespect will not be tolerated.

LESSON PLAN FIVE: CONFORMITY

Part I: Conformity in Schools (pp. 312–317)

Summary

This section introduces and questions how schools limit students' personal freedom and require some degree of conformity. It offers various specific examples of fairly extreme censoring of behavior and expression, and then looks to connect this to broader political and cultural trends that discourage divergent thoughts and actions. This discussion also brings up the question of what, exactly, the

purpose of education is and what a proper balance between creative activity and civil norms might be.

Goals & Objectives

1. To consider the issue of required conformity in school.
2. To explore broader ways that institutions and cultures promote conformity.
3. To define and discuss the purpose of education.

Comprehension Questions

1. Why was Amelia suspended from school? How was the situation resolved?
2. What are some specific examples of schools forcing conformity?
3. What are some specific examples of students conforming voluntarily?

Writing Response/Discussion Questions

1. What's the difference between equality and conformity?
2. In what ways, if any, does your school encourage or demand conformity? What is the justification or argument for this?
3. To what extent might conformity be useful or even necessary? Is speaking the same language, for example, an act of conformity? Why or why not?
4. Examine and describe any situations in which you become self-conscious of what you say or do before you say or do it. Does this seem thoughtful and healthy, or a conforming impulse?
5. If individual identity is so important to students, why do you think they conform, behavior that Robbins argues can hide or stunt their development?

Exercise

Interview a school administrator in an attempt to better understand the values and motivations behind school policies that you believe require conformity. Prepare a list of questions beforehand. This might include: What are the challenges of overseeing such a large group of people? What is the role of conformity in such a task? Are you concerned with students' creative freedoms? How do you balance the two? Present your findings as a class presentation or an essay.

Part II: The Courage of Nonconformists (pp. 149–153)

Summary

This section begins the direct consideration of conformity by looking at past and recent scientific findings about human tendencies. In the 1950s, social psychologist Solomon Asch discovered the extent to which college students would go to deny their own sensory perceptions and judgments in the face of contrary social opinion. Sixty years later, MRI technology suggests that this behavior isn't simply about imitation but that the biology of the brain can change visual perception to align with group opinion. Lastly, the role of the brain's fear response is discussed as a possible key to understanding the impulse to conform.

Goals & Objectives

1. To consider the scientific research regarding conforming behavior.
2. To evaluate and apply scientific findings in an analysis of student behavior.
3. To analyze how a writer might integrate research into his or her work.

Comprehension Questions

1. What did social psychologist Solomon Asch demonstrate in the 1950s about conformity?
2. What have neuroscientists discovered more recently to help explain Asch's findings?
3. What does Robbins mean when she explains that our brains "cheat"?
4. Explain the Law of Large Numbers. How is it relevant to conformity?
5. What do the findings of Gregory Berns add to the discussion?

Writing Response/Discussion Questions

1. In what ways do you conform? Consider your appearance, behavior, ideology, etc.
2. Does conformity feel oppressive and limiting or comfortable and safe?
3. If we all conform to some extent, what about you makes you an individual? For each thing on your list, consider how many others in your school, community, or the world share this quality or trait.
4. What, if anything, prevents you from "blending in with the crowd"? Do you feel the fear the scientists speak of?

Exercise

Read and analyze Robbins's use and presentation of scientific findings in this section. Does it seem clear, appropriate, and convincing? Then, research a number of studies, both old and recent, done regarding a human behavioral trait of your choosing. How are the findings different? Do the more recent studies contradict or support the older ones?

Write a summary of the scientific insights you found, paying particular attention to clearly explain both the methodology of the experiments and the findings. Work to balance your own language and sentences with that of the scientific writing.

LESSON PLAN SIX: CHAPTER SIX: SELF-DESIGNED CHALLENGES (p. 179)

Summary

In this chapter Robbins explains in detail what she means in the Introduction when she admits to crossing a line. Instead of just observing and interviewing the students, as a journalist or social scientist might, she designs and suggests a social challenge for each of the seven individuals. After getting to know them and their individual experiences and strengths well, developing an understanding of how each has been labeled and treated socially, and gaining their trust, Robbins challenges each to act. All but one take on the challenge and achieve fascinating results.

Goals & Objectives

1. To further explore and understand the dynamics of social clique formation.
2. To examine one's own social situation and consider improvement.
3. To explore the possibility of social mobility among new groups.

Preparation

1. It is best that any students participating in this lesson first read *Geeks* in its entirety. The complexity and subtlety of each student's experience leading up to the challenge is a necessary part of designing a healthy and appropriate one for themselves.
2. Discuss each of the seven challenges regarding their goals, appropriateness, and risks.

Exercise

First, if you have not already, fill out the survey form that begins the study guide (ask your teacher if you haven't received it). This is an essential way to gain awareness about your particular social situation at school and your potential goals regarding social interaction, and eventually to design an appropriate challenge.

Then, just as in *Geeks*, write up a brief summary of your social situation and your goals for change. Use Chapter 6 as a model. The more clearly you can articulate this for yourself at this stage, the better you will be able to design an appropriate and valuable challenge.

Once you have a clear idea of what you would like to try to change or improve about your social situation, design a challenge. What action might you take? It might be something as direct as Danielle having to talk to more people to try to make friends. It might be more profound, like Blue switching his entire friend group. Or, like Noah, it might be about getting other groups to connect or work together.

Whatever you choose, keep several important things in mind:

1. While some anxiety is sure to result from any risk, do not attempt something overwhelming or that you are very uncomfortable with. Avoid extreme risks like Joy's confrontation of an aggressive and potentially violent individual or group.
2. As in *Geeks*, do not tell anyone what your challenge or project is while you are engaging in it, except your teacher, who should serve as a guide and confidant.
3. You are not trying to change yourself or someone else. Your goal is to improve your experience. If you happen to affect others for the better, great, but don't push to try to get others to change. Remember, this is your challenge.

Keep a daily journal of your actions and the resulting experience. Be specific. At the end of a defined time, write a narrative analytical essay that tells of and examines the entire experience of the challenge.

LESSON PLAN SEVEN: IMAGINING A QUIRK TRANSFORMED

Goals & Objectives

1. To more clearly identify your own characteristics, skills, and interests that might be the source of social difficulties in school and begin to imagine their value outside of school.
2. To begin seeking out places and activities beyond school where your "quirks" are valuable.
3. To identify and contact successful people who also possess similar "quirks."

Exercise

Once you have gained a clear understanding of Quirk Theory, look back at the original survey you filled out. Identify and make a list of each of the particular characteristics, abilities, or interests that have caused you to be labeled as part of one fringe group or another.

1. For each thing on your list, make another list of situations (jobs, activities, etc.) out in the world

beyond school that require that skill or would benefit from it. If possible, make a plan to participate in one of these activities.

2. Make a list of people (at any level) who have become successful because of a similar quirk. Write a thoughtful letter to them perhaps asking for advice or telling your story regarding this quirk. (Note: If you decide to actually send the letter or email, keep in mind that depending on who you write to, you may or may not actually hear back. This doesn't mean you shouldn't necessarily send it!)

LESSON PLAN EIGHT (AP1): LOGOS, ETHOS, PATHOS: WRITING FOR DIFFERENT AUDIENCES

Summary

Geeks shows very clearly the various people at different social levels involved in the issue of social cliques: students; teachers; parents; school administrators; local, state, and federal government, etc. Successful argumentative writers are able to alter tone and argumentative approach depending on any given audience.

Goals & Objectives

1. To understand how considering audience is key to writing success.
2. To explore rhetorical strategies concerning style and argument: logos, ethos, and pathos.
3. To learn to balance formal elements of writing (tone, diction, etc.) and content (claim, evidence, etc.) in ways most appropriate for different audiences.

Preparation

1. While it is not necessary, it will be beneficial to read two sections of Geeks that aren't about students: "Parents and 'Normality'" (p. 221) and "How Schools Make Things Worse" (p. 300).
2. Discuss the concepts of logos, ethos, and pathos as different ways to persuade. There are a number of examples of each in the two sections just mentioned.

Exercise

Part I: Writing

Write a paragraph that describes unfair or problematic treatment of a specific fringe student because of his or her nonconformist qualities or characteristics. Then write a second paragraph that argumentatively makes a suggestion or request to improve the situation. If you are in a position to write about an actual person—a friend or even yourself—of course you can do so. This will add

immediate relevance. If not, the exercise works perfectly well writing about one of the six students in Geeks.

Part II: Logos, Ethos, and Pathos

Analyze your writing in terms of these three types of persuasion. How much of each has naturally occurred in your writing? If all three categories were not present in your first attempt, what could you add to demonstrate all three?

Part III: Revising for a Particular Audience

Choose one of the following as the intended audience for your paragraphs:

1. An offending popular student
2. A parent (either of the offended student or the offending one)
3. A teacher
4. A school administrator
5. A school board member
6. A local government official
7. A state congressman/woman or senator
8. A federal agency or organization

With this person in mind, rewrite your paragraphs in a way that you think would best communicate the issue and convince him or her to take your suggestion. What are your reasons for these choices?

LESSON PLAN NINE (AP): TYPES OF ESSAYS: ARGUMENT, RHETORICAL ANALYSIS, SYNTHESIS

Summary

The AP exam in Language and Composition requires students to go beyond approaching and analyzing nonfiction texts as a reader to possessing an understanding of and ability to create them as a writer. Geeks lends itself well to exploring and understanding the three standard types of essay writing by extensively demonstrating argument and synthesis, but also by providing many rhetorical strategies to be analyzed and discussed.

Goals & Objectives

1. To define three different types of essays.
2. To recognize each type of writing and argument in the text of *Geeks* and elsewhere.
3. To demonstrate command writing each type of essay.

Exercise

1. Argument: As you read through sections or the entirety of *Geeks*, identify the many claims, big and small, that Robbins makes.
 - a. What is the specific subject?
 - b. What is the claim being made about the subject?
 - c. What evidence is offered for the claim?
 - d. What form does this evidence take (scientific finding, anecdotal example, illustration, etc.)?
2. Rhetorical Analysis: Throughout *Geeks* Robbins employs many different rhetorical modes. Choose particular passages that you find powerful, vivid, and interesting and analyze them to discover what specifically it is that makes them so.
 - a. What specific details stand out?
 - b. How would you describe the tone of the passage? Does it vary? When and how?
 - c. Examine the syntax of the sentences. Are they long and complex or simple and punchy? How does this affect your reading?
 - d. How is each paragraph organized?
 - e. Is figurative language used? If so, is it more effective than literal writing?
3. Synthesis: Take a look at the various ways Robbins offers and integrates findings from her research. Of course this includes the narrative information from the students. But there is also often historical or scientific information offered (pp. 149–153, for example).
 - a. How is the information introduced? Is there a signal phrase with names and titles?
 - b. Does the information change the tone of the writing? Explain.
 - c. Is Robbins's voice maintained while presenting scientific findings?
 - d. How does Robbins handle scientific jargon? What are the challenges of this?
 - e. Does the information serve to explain, illustrate, as evidence? How effective is it?

LESSON PLAN TEN (AP): RHETORICAL MODES OF DEVELOPMENT

Summary

There are many ways to develop a particular paragraph or section of an essay. These include narration, description, process analysis, exemplification, comparison/contrast, classification and division, definition, and cause and effect. *Geeks* employs all of these throughout and makes for a rich learning text.

Goals & Objectives

1. To become familiar with the many patterns used to present and develop ideas rhetorically.
2. To understand the advantages and disadvantages of each mode of development.
3. To recognize different modes in the context of larger works like *Geeks* and discuss impact and effectiveness.
4. To practice and develop command of each mode as a writer.

Exercise

Identify the Different Modes: Multiple Choice

Read each of the following passages from *Geeks*. Choose the answer that best describes the mode of development that it employs. (Note: Some of these have been chosen because they walk very fine lines between two different modes. Occasionally it could be argued that they combine more than one mode. This is to generate discussion about the particular elements that distinguish one from another.

1. Danielle turned away from the cafeteria window and meandered down another hallway, attempting to quash her anxiety. If I don't find someone I know, I'm going to end up standing alone at the front of the cafeteria. She hid in the bathroom for a few minutes, washing her hands to kill time, then waited by the sink until she decided to go to the library. On the way, Danielle bumped into Paige's freshman sister and followed her back to the lunchroom. They sat at the last of the underclassman tables at the far right of the room. (p. 5)
 - a. exemplification
 - b. process analysis
 - c. narration
 - d. cause and effect

2. In some schools, students use the Japanese word *otaku* to describe kids who are anime connoisseurs. This is a limited version of the true Japanese definition, in which *otaku* refers to an obsession with any sphere, whether anime, trains, or celebrities. Anime devotees say that otakus are more knowledgeable than the average "anime kid." (p. 39)
- a. comparison/contrast
 - b. exemplification
 - c. description
 - d. definition
3. Gangsters (or "gangstas") . . . are often characterized by baggy pants for the guys, tight clothes and hoop earrings for the girls, and nice sneakers for both genders. Gangsters sometimes overlap with ghetto kids, who supposedly listen to rap and hip-hop and act up in class. At some schools, gangsters are synonymous with fighters. (p. 41)
- a. definition
 - b. description
 - c. exemplification
 - d. narration
4. Geeks and nerds also can find roots in perceived obsessions, nerds with academia and geeks with technological gear. Many students describe nerds as the kids with giant backpacks who, as a Hawaii band geek put it, "even if they aren't tardy, they run while everyone else is walking." . . . Although both groups are known for smarts and social marginalization, nerds might be inclined toward unusual intellectual pursuits, and geeks toward unusual recreational ones. (p. 39)
- a. description
 - b. compare/contrast
 - c. process analysis
 - d. classification and division

5. In 1896, French naturalist Jean-Henri Fabre developed an interest in processionary caterpillars, which move in long, head-to-tail lines. Fabre observed the caterpillars circling the rim of a flowerpot in a continuous loop. He placed the caterpillars' favorite food "not a hands' breadth away." For seven days, the caterpillars instinctively followed each other around the rim until they died of hunger and exhaustion. (p. 161)
- a. narration
 - b. exemplification
 - c. process analysis
 - d. compare/contrast
6. In the business world, people who live their lives according to their core values tend to have strong brands with devoted followings. Craigslist, which is worth more than \$5 billion, succeeds because of its down-to-earth "nerd values," wrote founder Craig Newmark, who "grew up wearing a plastic pocket protector and thick, black glasses, taped together, the full nerd cliché." Ben and Jerry, of the eponymous ice-cream brand, have said that they became successful because, although they didn't always know what they were doing, they knew why they were doing it. (p. 165)
- a. exemplification
 - b. description
 - c. cause and effect
 - d. classification and division
7. Author J. K. Rowling, who has described herself as "a squat, bespectacled child who lived mostly in books and daydreams," was bullied in school because she was different. . . . Musician Bruce Springsteen was so unpopular in high school that "other people didn't even know I was there," he has said. He started a band because "I was on the outside looking in." . . . Television host Tim Gunn, who identified himself as "a classic nerd" in school, was "crazy about making things . . .," he has said. "Between my stutter and my fetishizing of Lego textures, I was taunted and teased." (pp. 7–8)
- a. process analysis
 - b. cause and effect
 - c. exemplification
 - d. narration